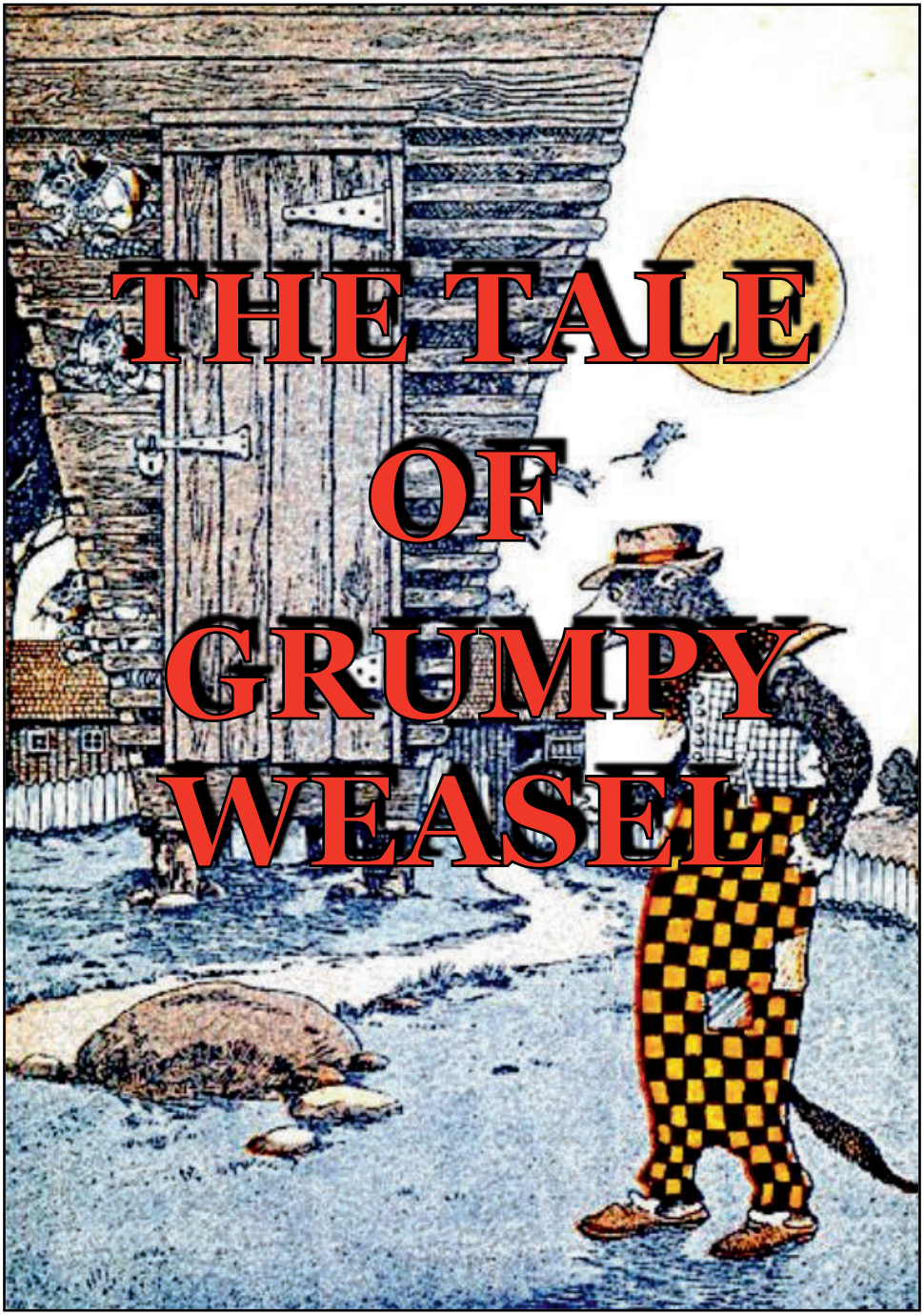
THE TALE
OF
GRUMPY
WEASEL

THE TALE OF GRUMPY WEASEL

By

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1920

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THE TALE OF

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I

A SLIM RASCAL

Old Mr. Crow often remarked that if Grumpy Weasel really wanted to be of some use in the world he would spend his time at the sawmill filling knot holes in boards.

"He's so slender," Mr. Crow would say, "that he can push himself into a knot hole no bigger round than Farmer Green's thumb."

Naturally it did not please old Mr. Crow when Solomon Owl went out of his way

one day to tell him that he was sadly mistaken. For after hearing some gossip repeat Mr. Crow's opinion Solomon Owl—the wise old bird—had given several long hoots and hurried off, though it was broad daylight, to set Mr. Crow right.

"The trouble—" Solomon explained when he had found Mr. Crow on the edge of the woods —"the trouble with your plan to have Grumpy Weasel work in the sawmill is that he wouldn't keep a knot hole filled longer than a jiffy. It's true that he can fit a very small hole. But if you'd ever watched him closely you'd know that he's in a hole and out the other side so fast you can scarcely see what happens. He's entirely too active to fill the bill."

Old Mr. Crow made a queer noise in his throat, which showed that Solomon Owl had made him angry.

"I never said anything about Grumpy Weasel's filling any bills," Mr. Crow spluttered. "Knot holes were what I had in mind. I've no doubt,

though, that you'd like Grumpy Weasel to fill your own bill."

Now, if Solomon Owl had not tried more than once to catch Grumpy Weasel perhaps Mr. Crow's retort wouldn't have made him feel so uncomfortable. And muttering that he wished when people spoke of his beak they wouldn't call it a bill, and that Mr. Crow was too stupid to talk to, Solomon blundered away into the woods.

It was true, of course, that Grumpy Weasel was about the quickest of all the furred folk in Pleasant Valley. Why, you might be looking at him as he stopped for a moment on a stone wall; and while you looked he would vanish before your eyes. It was just as if he had melted away in an instant, so quickly could he dart into a crevice between the stones.

It was surprising, too, that he could whisk himself out of sight so fast, for his body was absurdly long. But if he was long in one way he was short in another. Yes! Grumpy Weasel had the shortest temper of all the field- and

forest-folk throughout Pleasant Valley. Even peppery Peter Mink was not so short-tempered as he.

So terrible tempered was Grumpy Weasel that whenever the news flashed through the woods that he was out hunting, all the small people kept quite still, because they were afraid. And even some of the bigger ones—a good deal bigger than Grumpy Weasel himself—felt uneasy.

So you can see whether or not Grumpy Weasel was welcome.

II

AT THE OLD STONE WALL

Little Mr. Chippy suddenly set up a great twitter. Anybody could see that he was frightened. And one of Jolly Robin's sons, perched in an apple tree near the stone wall where Mr. Chippy lived in a wild grapevine, wondered what could be the matter.

Presently, as he looked beneath him, he saw a long, slim shape dart from a chink of the old wall, and as quickly disappear.

"Huh!" said young Master Robin. "Foolish people who build their homes on walls must expect snakes for visitors." And feeling quite wise and grown up, he turned his back on Mr.

Chippy, as if it really made no difference to him if Mr. Chippy did have a dangerous caller.

Meanwhile others of the bird neighbors began to echo Mr. Chippy's warning notes. And young Master Robin thought everybody was silly to make such a fuss over the misfortunes of a humble person like Mr. Chippy.

"If they don't look out they'll scare all the angleworms back into their holes," he grumbled—a remark which shows that he knew little about the ways of the world. And when Rusty Wren swerved near him and called to him to look out for Mr. Chippy's visitor—that he was "a bad one"—young Master Robin actually puffed himself up with rage.

"He seems to think I'm in danger of falling out of this tree," he sneered aloud. "He doesn't know that I can handle my

self in a tree as well as he can." As he spoke, Master Robin all but tumbled off his perch. But he caught himself just in time, then

looked around hastily to see if anybody had noticed his awkwardness.

All this time poor Mr. Chippy's cries continued. There was really no reason for his alarm. For his wife was away from home, with all their children. But Mr. Chippy kept flying back and forth in a great flutter. He too called to young Master Robin that he'd better go home.

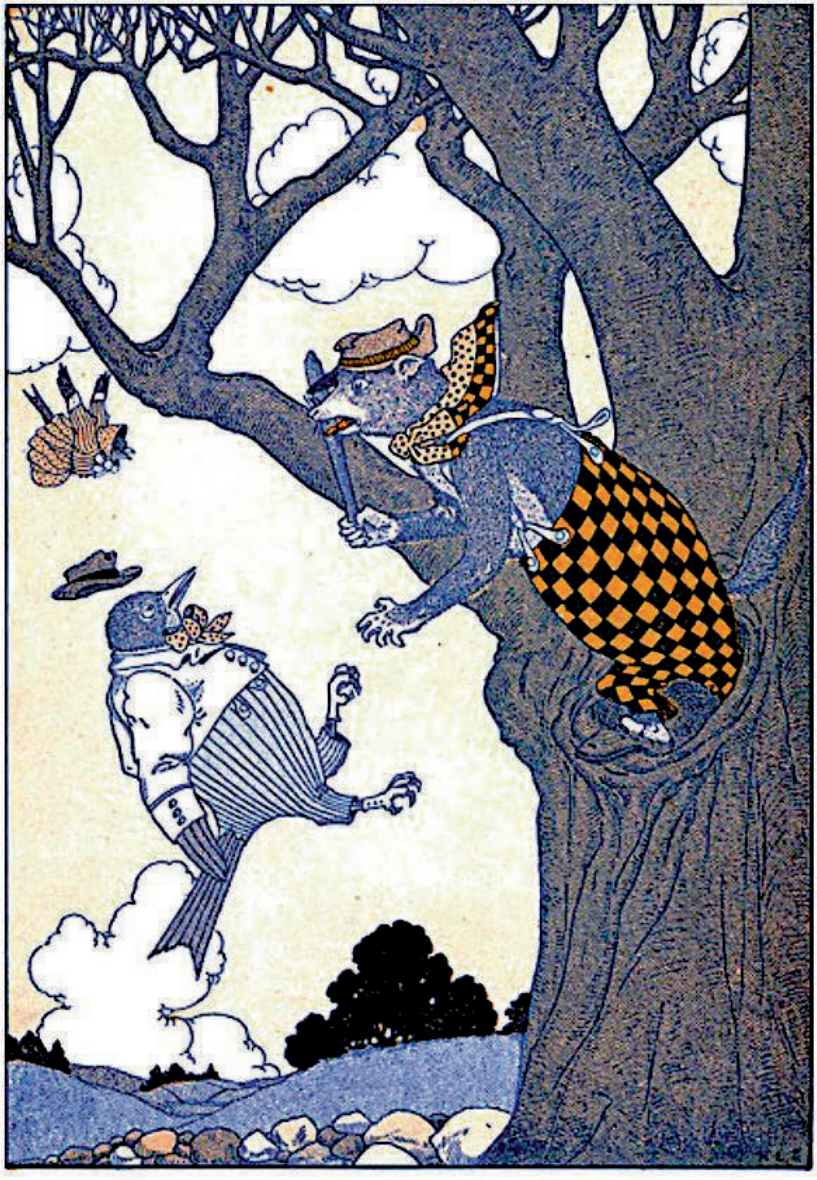
Still that knowing youngster paid no heed to his elder's advice.

"If snakes climb trees I've never seen them do it," he scoffed.

"Hi, there! Haven't you seen——" Mr. Chippy started to say. But before he could finish his question Master Robin interrupted him rudely.

"Certainly I saw him," he cried. “I saw him come out of the wall and go in again."

"He'll get you if you don't go away!" Mr. Chippy shrieked.



Master Robin Escapes From Grumpy Weasel.

"Let him try!" Master Robin scoffed. He was sorry that Mr. Chippy did not hear him. But that distracted little person had already hurried off to warn somebody else.

It was no time at all before Rusty Wren's wife gave a piercing scream.

"That fat Robin boy—he'll be caught!" she wailed.

Now, it made Master Robin very angry to be spoken of in such a way as that.

"Fat!" he burst out in a loud tone as he stared in Mrs. Wren's direction. "Who's fat?"

"You are!" said a strange, grumpy voice right behind him—or so it seemed to young Master Robin.

III

MASTER ROBIN'S LESSON

When young Master Robin heard the strange voice that sounded so grumpy and so near him he was terribly frightened. He forgot that he thought himself grown up, and very wise, and quite able to go about alone. He didn't even look to see who was speaking, but fell backwards off the limb of the apple tree.

It was lucky for him, too, that he fell just when he did. For a long brownish person, white underneath, took Master Robin's place on the limb so promptly that you could hardly have said he jumped into it from somewhere else. He seemed to have popped out of the tree somewhat as a freshly popped kernel of corn

bursts forth. A moment ago it was not there! You were watching, but did not see it grow big.

Well, all at once there was silence in the orchard. Everybody was holding his breath, waiting to see what happened to young Master Robin. Though he had lost his balance and tumbled backward he righted himself quite like an old-timer and flew off across the orchard.

"I didn't know snakes could climb trees," he stammered to Mr. Chippy, who had followed him.

"Snakes!" Mr. Chippy piped. "That wasn't a snake! That was Grumpy Weasel.... And it's a wonder you ever escaped," he added. "I must learn that backward somersault. It's a good thing to know."

You can see that Mr. Chippy was a very humble person. But Mr. Jolly Robin's eldest son was quite proud. Already he began to feel

that he had been very skillful in escaping. But of course it was only an accident that he got away.

For once in his life Grumpy Weasel had been careless. It had looked so easy—catching that clumsy young robin! He had spoken to Master Robin, not dreaming that he could save himself. To make matters worse, Grumpy had found Mr. Chippy's nest empty. And Grumpy Weasel was the sort of person that liked to find a bird at home when he called. It always made him more ill-natured than usual to make a call for nothing. And now he had let a stupid young Robin escape him. So it is not surprising that his big black eyes snapped nor that he said something in a fierce voice that sounded like "Chip, chip, chip," but meant something a good deal worse.

And to add to Grumpy Weasel's rage, somebody had laughed hoarsely—somebody that sat in a tall elm across the road.

If he could have caught Mr. Crow there is no doubt that Grumpy would have made that

black scamp sorry that he laughed. But old Mr. Crow was too wary to let anybody surprise him. "Haw, haw!" he laughed again. And Grumpy Weasel actually couldn't bear to hear him. Some of the onlookers claimed afterward that they saw Grumpy Weasel start down the tree. And that was as much as they could say. No one knew how he managed to slip out of sight. And the field people say that he was never seen again in that exact spot.

IV

HUNTING A HOLE

Usually Grumpy Weasel did not stray far from a certain corner of Farmer Green's wood lot. He preferred to hunt where he knew the lay of the land. And since he liked especially to hunt along old stone walls, he picked out a long stretch of old tumble-down wall that reached through the woods towards Blue Mountain.

He picked it out as his very own hunting ground and never asked permission of Farmer Green, either.

Now, near the lower end of this wall—the end toward the pasture—a fat person known as Mr. Meadow Mouse sometimes wandered. But he never visited that spot without first

inquiring whether Grumpy Weasel had been there the day before. Mr. Meadow Mouse had learned somehow that Grumpy usually moved on each day to a different part of his hunting ground. He was surprised, therefore, to meet Grumpy Weasel face to face one time, when he felt sure that that surly rogue must be a good safe distance away.

Mr. Meadow Mouse cast a quick glance around. But he could see no place to hide. So there was nothing for him to do but to put on a bold front. He bowed pleasantly enough, though he was trembling a little, and remarked that it was a fine day and that he hoped Grumpy was feeling happy—all of which was quite true.

Grumpy Weasel glowered at Mr. Meadow Mouse, for that was his way of replying to a kindly greeting.

"You've not come here to hunt, I hope," he growled. "I'll have you know that this is my private hunting ground and I allow no poaching."

Mr. Meadow Mouse hastened to explain that he was merely out for a stroll.

"I never hunt," he declared. "Of course, if I happen to see a tiny seed I may stop to eat it. But that's all."

"You'd better be careful what you say!" Grumpy Weasel snapped. "Unless I'm mistaken, you were hunting something the moment you saw me. You were hunting a hole."

Mr. Meadow Mouse gasped slightly. He hardly knew what to say.

"Be very careful where you go around here!" Grumpy Weasel warned him. "The holes in this stone wall are all mine.

I shouldn't want you to use a single one of them without my permission."

Mr. Meadow Mouse assured him that he wouldn't dream of trespassing.

"And these holes among the roots of the trees —they are mine too," Grumpy Weasel snarled.

"Oh, certainly! Certainly!" Mr. Meadow Mouse cried. He was so quick to agree that for once Grumpy Weasel couldn't think of anything more to find fault about.

"I'll let you crawl into a few of the smaller holes in the stone wall, if you'll be careful not to hurt them," he offered grudgingly.

Mr. Meadow Mouse made haste to thank him.

He said, however, that he thought he would wait till some other time.

"There's no time like the present,"

Grumpy Weasel grumbled. "To tell the truth, I want to see if you can squeeze through as small a hole as I can."

V

SOLOMON OWL INTERRUPTS

Plump little Mr. Meadow Mouse wished he had stayed away from Grumpy Weasel's hunting ground. He would have scampered off, had he not known that Grumpy could overtake him before he had made three leaps. So he saw no way out of his trouble, though he could think of nothing less agreeable than trying to slip through a small hole with Grumpy Weasel close at hand, watching him narrowly.

Then all at once Mr. Meadow Mouse had an idea. "You go first!" he said politely. "Go through any hole you choose and then I'll try my luck."

But Grumpy Weasel was too crafty to do that.

"You'd try your luck at running away," he snarled. "You are the one to go first; and we'll have no words about it."

Well, Mr. Meadow Mouse began to shake more than ever.

"Don't you think," he quavered, "that we'd better wait a few days until I'm a bit smaller? I'm afraid I've been overeating lately and I might get stuck in a hole. And of course that would be awkward."

"Ha, ha!" Grumpy Weasel actually laughed. But it was not what any one could call a hearty, wholesome, cheerful sort of laugh. On the contrary, it sounded very cruel and gloating.

"Hoo, hoo!" Another laugh—this one weird and hollow—boomed out from the hemlock tree just above Mr. Meadow Mouse's head.

He jumped, in spite of himself—did Mr. Meadow Mouse. And so, too, did Grumpy Weasel. Both of them leaped for the old stone

wall. And each flashed into a crevice between the stones, though Grumpy Weasel was ever so much the quicker of the two. They knew Solomon Owl's voice too well to mistake his odd laughter.

"What's your hurry, gentlemen?" Solomon called to them.

Mild Mr. Meadow Mouse made no reply. But from Grumpy Weasel's hiding place an angry hiss told Solomon Owl that one of them, at least, had heard his question.

"Come out!" said Solomon Owl. "Don't be shy! I've dined already."

Well, that made the two in the wall feel somewhat bolder. And soon they ventured to peep out and gaze at Solomon, to see whether he looked like a person who had just enjoyed a good meal.

"You're not as hollow as you sound, I hope," Grumpy Weasel remarked with some suspicion in his tone.

As for Mr. Meadow Mouse, he wouldn't dream of making so rude a remark.

"It's a fine evening and I hope you're feeling happy," he piped.

"Oh, very! Very!" said Solomon Owl solemnly.

Mr. Meadow Mouse was a trusting sort of chap. He was all ready to leave his cranny. But Grumpy Weasel was not yet satisfied.

"Which one of us are you answering?" he demanded of Solomon.

"Him!" said Solomon.

"Did you say, 'Ahem?'" Grumpy Weasel wanted to know.

"No, no!" Solomon assured him. "I said, 'him.' I was answering your friend."

Grumpy Weasel made a wry face, as if he did not care to have anybody speak of Mr. Meadow Mouse as a friend of his. And he did

not quit the stone wall until he had seen Mr. Meadow Mouse venture forth in safety.

"Just by accident I overheard your remarks a few minutes ago," Mr. Owl explained. "I'd like to watch this hole-crawling contest. And I'll stay here and be the umpire—and see that there's fair play."

VI

MR. MEADOW MOUSE ESCAPES

Grumpy Weasel did not like Solomon Owl's offer to be umpire of the hole-crawling contest between Mr. Meadow Mouse and himself. He hissed a few times and glared at Solomon Owl, up in the hemlock tree.

Solomon Owl did not appear to mind that, but calmly outstared Grumpy Weasel without once blinking. "Are you both ready?" he asked presently.

"Yes, thank you!" Mr. Meadow Mouse answered. And Grumpy Weasel gave a sort of shrug, as if to say that he supposed he was.

"First you may try that hole between those mossy stones," Mr. Owl announced, with a tilt of his head toward the wall.

"Certainly!" cried Mr. Meadow Mouse.

"You go first and I'll follow," Grumpy Weasel told him.

And Mr. Meadow Mouse didn't dare disobey. He whisked through the hole spryly and was back again in no time.

Then Grumpy took his turn. He was certainly quicker than Mr. Meadow Mouse. Even the umpire, Solomon Owl, had to admit that.

"But of course that's not the point," Solomon observed. "It's the one that gets stuck in a hole that loses the contest."

Well, after Grumpy and Mr. Meadow Mouse had slipped through several holes, each one smaller than the one before, Mr. Meadow Mouse said that he thought it was only polite to let Grumpy go first. Secretly Mr. Meadow Mouse was afraid of what might happen if he

should have the misfortune to get wedged in a hole, with Grumpy Weasel ready to follow him. He had had some trouble getting through the last one and he knew that he could never squeeze through one that was much smaller.

Grumpy Weasel lost his temper at once.

"I'll do as I please on my stone wall!" he snapped. And he was angrier than ever when Solomon Own said to him, "It's your turn!" Probably no other of the woods people—unless it was one of the Hawk family—could have made Grumpy Weasel obey. And now he insisted that if he "went first" he ought to be allowed to choose whatever hole he pleased.

Both Solomon Owl and Mr. Meadow Mouse agreed. So Grumpy Weasel popped through a hole of his own choosing, and he did not reappear, though he called to Mr. Meadow Mouse to "come on."

Mr. Meadow Mouse hung back.

"You'll have to excuse me," he stammered.

"What's the matter?" boomed Solomon Owl. "Do you want to lose the contest?"

"No!" said Mr. Meadow Mouse. "But Grumpy Weasel is still inside that hole. There's no other way out."

"How do you know?" Solomon Owl asked him.

"Oh, I've been here before, often," Mr. Meadow Mouse replied.

"Are you sure?" Mr. Owl inquired.

"I'll go on the other side of the wall and look," Mr. Meadow Mouse offered. And thereupon he skipped over the wall.

Solomon Owl waited patiently. And so did Grumpy Weasel. But Mr. Meadow Mouse never came back. Once out of sight he scampered away. And he never trespassed on Grumpy Weasel's hunting ground again.

VII

PADDY MUSKRAT'S BLUNDER

Sometimes Grumpy Weasel found the hunting poor along the stretch of stone wall that he called his own—though of course it really belonged to Farmer Green. And though he disliked to wander much in strange neighborhoods, once in a while he visited other parts of Pleasant Valley.

It was on such an excursion to the bank of the mill pond that he caught sight, one day, of Paddy Muskrat—or to be more exact, that Paddy Muskrat caught sight of him.

Now it was seldom that anybody spoke to Grumpy Weasel. On the contrary, most of the

forest-folk dodged out of sight whenever they saw him, and said nothing. So he wheeled like a flash and started to run when somebody called, "Hullo, stranger!"

One quick backward glance at a small wet head in the water told Grumpy that he had nothing to fear.

"Hullo, yourself!" he retorted "And you'd better not call me 'stranger,' because I'm no stranger than you are."

Well, Paddy Muskrat—for it was he who had spied Grumpy Weasel on the bank of the pond—saw at once that whoever the slender and elegant person might be, he had the worst of manners. Though Paddy had lived in the mill pond a long time, he had never met any one that looked exactly like the newcomer. To be sure, there was Peter Mink, who was long-bodied and short-tempered, as the stranger appeared to be. But when Paddy inquired whether the visitor wasn't a distant connection of the Mink family (as indeed he was!), Grumpy Weasel said, "What! Do you

mean to insult me by asking whether I'm related to such a ragged, ruffianly crowd?"

Somehow Paddy Muskrat rather liked that answer, for Peter Mink and all his family were fine swimmers and most unwelcome in the mill pond.

And perhaps—who knew?—perhaps the spic-and-span chap on the bank, with the sleek coat and black-tipped tail, was one of the kind that didn't like to get his feet wet.

Then Paddy Muskrat asked the stranger a silly question. He was not the wisest person, anyhow, in Pleasant Valley, as his wife often reminded him. “You're not a distant relation of Tommy Fox, are you?" he inquired.

Grumpy Weasel actually almost smiled.

"Now, how did you happen to guess that?" he asked.

"Because you've got such a sharp nose," Paddy Muskrat replied. And he was quite pleased

with himself, for he thought that he wasn't so stupid as some people thought.

"Any other reason?" Grumpy Weasel inquired, stepping to the edge of the overhanging bank.

"You don't like to get your feet wet," Paddy Muskrat said. And feeling safe as anything, he swam nearer the spot where the stranger was crouching.

Paddy saw, almost too late, that he had made a bad blunder. For without the slightest warning Grumpy Weasel leaped at him. And had not Paddy been a wonderful swimmer and able to dive like a flash, he would never have dashed, panting, into his house a few moments later.

"What on earth is the matter?" his wife asked him.

"I've been having a swimming race with a stranger," Paddy explained. "I don't know his name. But I do know that he'd just as soon get his feet wet as I would."

"Well, why not?" Mrs. Muskrat inquired. "That only shows he's sensible."

"Does it show I'm sensible, too?" Paddy asked her.

"Certainly not!" said Mrs. Muskrat.

VIII

THE DARE

If Grumpy Weasel had been a faster runner the forest people wouldn't have been so surprised when he dared Jimmy Rabbit to race him. Everybody knew that Jimmy was swift-footed—especially since he once beat old Mr. Turtle (but that is another story).

When Mr. Crow, who was a great bearer of news, told Jimmy Rabbit one day that Grumpy Weasel wanted a race with him, Jimmy Rabbit seemed more than willing to oblige. "Where, when, and how far does Grumpy want to run against me?" he asked.

Mr. Crow said that he didn't know, but that he would make it his business to find out. So off he hurried to find Grumpy Weasel, for if there was anything Mr. Crow liked it was busying himself with other people's affairs.

He did not have what you could call a pleasant talk with Grumpy Weasel. Once when Mr. Crow alighted too near the ground Grumpy jumped at him. And several times he called Mr. Crow a nest-robber and an egg-thief, though goodness knows Grumpy Weasel himself was as bad as the worst when it came to robbing birds' nests.

Although he felt as if he were about to burst with rage old Mr. Crow pretended to laugh. He had been having a rather dull time, waiting for Farmer Green to plant his corn, and he thought that a lively race might put him in better spirits.

Grumpy Nearly Catches Paddy Muskrat.

"Where do you want to race against Jimmy Rabbit?" Mr. Crow asked.

"We'll start from this wall," said Grumpy sulkily, "because it's always better to start from where you are than where you aren't."

Mr. Crow said that that seemed reasonable.

"When do you want to race?" he added.

"The sooner we start the quicker we'll finish," Grumpy Weasel snapped.

"Quite true, quite true!" Mr. Crow agreed. "And now may I inquire how long a race you want to run?"

"No longer than I have to!" Grumpy growled. "Not more than a day or two, I hope!"

Mr. Crow snickered slightly. "I see you don't understand my question," he observed. "Are you going to run a mile, or only a few yards?"

"How do I know?" Grumpy cried, as if he had no patience with his questioner. "How could

anybody tell? I'll let Jimmy Rabbit start twenty jumps ahead of me and we'll run till I catch him."

Well, Mr. Crow laughed right out loud when he heard that. And he was about to tell Grumpy that he would have to run till the end of his days if he raced Jimmy Rabbit in any such fashion as that. But he saw all at once that such a race would be a great joke. And he said to himself with a chuckle that the laugh would be on Grumpy Weasel. For Jimmy Rabbit was so swift a runner that nobody who knew anything at all would ever consent to give him a start—much less propose such a thing.

"Very well!" said Mr. Crow with a smirk, "I'll report to Jimmy Rabbit. I'll tell him where, when and how you want to race, and there's no doubt that your plan will please him."

"I hope it won't!" Grumpy Weasel snarled. "I've never pleased anybody yet; and I don't mean to."

And that goes to show what an ill-natured scamp he was.

IX

SAVING HIS FEET

Old Mr. Crow and Jimmy Rabbit had a good laugh over Grumpy Weasel's plan for a race with Jimmy. They thought it a great joke.

"He needn't give me a start," Jimmy said. "I can beat Grumpy easily."

"Never mind that!" Mr. Crow advised. "You might as well let him have his way. He'll look all the more foolish, trying to catch up with you."

So Jimmy Rabbit agreed to run the race as Grumpy Weasel wished, saying that he was ready to start at once.

But Mr. Crow told him he had better wait till the next day. "That will give me time to tell everybody," he explained, "and then there'll be a big turnout to see you win—and to jeer at Grumpy Weasel for losing." And one could tell from Mr. Crow's remark that he liked Jimmy Rabbit and that he despised Grumpy Weasel.

The next day proved to be a fine one for the race. It wasn't too hot nor too cold; and early in the morning the field- and forest-people began gathering at Grumpy Weasel's hunting ground, where the stone wall touched the clearing.

About the only persons that objected to the time set for the race were Benjamin Bat and Solomon Owl. Benjamin said that he could never keep awake to watch it; and Solomon complained that he couldn't see well in the daytime. But all the rest of the company were in the best of spirits, giggling slyly whenever they looked at Grumpy Weasel, who seemed to pay scant heed to his neighbors, though you may be sure his roving black eyes took in

everything that was going on. He seemed more restless than ever as he waited for Jimmy Rabbit to arrive, walking to and fro on his front legs in a most peculiar fashion, while he kept his hind feet firmly planted on the ground in one spot. Of course he could never have moved about in this manner had his body not been so long and slender.

Noticing Grumpy's strange actions, old Mr. Crow looked worried and asked him what was the matter. "I hope your hind feet aren't troubling you, just as the race is about to begin," he said.

Grumpy Weasel hissed at the old gentleman before he replied: "Don't worry! You'll soon see that my hind feet can

travel as fast as my front ones—when I want to use them."

"Ah!" Mr. Crow exclaimed knowingly. "He's saving his hind feet for the race."

When Jimmy Rabbit reached the gathering place, coming up in a long lope, Mr. Crow hurried to meet him.

"I advise you to save your hind feet," he whispered. "Grumpy Weasel is saving his."

Jimmy Rabbit told Mr. Crow, with a smile, that he had saved his hind feet all his life—and his front ones, too.

"I've brought them along to-day," he said, "to help me win this race."

X

HA! AND HA, HAVE ARRIVED!

A great outcry rang through the woods the moment Jimmy Rabbit set out to race Grumpy Weasel and beat him. Shouts of "Good luck!" and "Run hard!" and "Hurrah for James Rabbit!" followed Jimmy. But old Mr. Crow squawked, "You don't need to hurry!" He thought that the race was already as good as won, for Grumpy Weasel had insisted on giving Jimmy Rabbit a start of twenty jumps.

Meanwhile Grumpy Weasel glowered. But he could not glower at Jimmy's friends, because he had to watch Jimmy

himself in order to count the first twenty jumps he took. When Grumpy had counted nineteen and a half away he started. And old Mr. Crow, as he sat staring at the race, declared that Grumpy Weasel hadn't a chance to win.

The company seemed ready to take Mr. Crow's word for it—that is, all except Grumpy Weasel's cousin, Peter Mink. He spoke up and said that as for him, he would wait and see what happened. He didn't believe old Mr. Crow knew what he was talking about.

Mr. Crow grew almost a purplish black with rage.

"We'll all wait," he said stiffly. "We'll all wait. And when the race is over you will apologize to me."

Peter Mink merely grinned. He had no respect for his elders. And now he didn't appear to mind in the least when

the entire company let him severely alone.

Mr. Crow shot a triumphant look at him about an hour later, when Jimmy Rabbit came bounding into sight, with no one following him. "You may as well stop now," Mr. Crow told Jimmy. "You've as good as won the race already."

Jimmy Rabbit said that he thought so, too, but he supposed he'd better keep running a while longer, till Grumpy Weasel gave up. So off he hopped again.

Everybody except Peter Mink laughed heartily when Grumpy Weasel came springing up the slope a little while later.

"You may as well stop now. You've as good as lost already," Mr. Crow greeted him.

"Whose race is this—yours or mine?" Grumpy Weasel hissed. And off he hurried, without pausing to hear Mr. Crow's answer.

"We'll wait a while longer," Mr. Crow told the company, "for the end is so near we may as well see it."

"Whose end?" Peter Mink asked him.

"I mean the end of the race, of course!" Mr. Crow squalled.

"Oh! I thought you meant the end of Jimmy Rabbit," Peter Mink replied.

"Impossible! Impossible!" was all Mr. Crow said to that. But he began to fidget—which was a sign that he was worried. And when Jimmy Rabbit appeared again Mr. Crow was not quite so cocksure when he asked if the race wasn't over.

"It would be," Jimmy Rabbit answered, "but the trouble is, Grumpy Weasel won't stop running!"

"Ha!" said Mr. Crow hoarsely. But Peter Mink said, "Ha, ha!" And there is a great difference between those two remarks, as we shall see.

XI

A LONG RACE

The famous race between Grumpy Weasel and Jimmy Rabbit went on and on. Jimmy turned and twisted this way and that, up and down and back and forth through Pleasant Valley. He could still run faster than Grumpy Weasel, it is true. But he was growing tired. Now and then Jimmy stopped to rest. And he kept hoping that Grumpy Weasel had become so weary that he had given up the chase.

But Grumpy Weasel never stopped once. And whenever Jimmy Rabbit spied him coming along his trail Jimmy would spring up with a sigh and rush off again.

He began to understand that such a race was no joke. He certainly didn't want to lose the race. And he certainly didn't want Grumpy Weasel to come up with him. He had always kept at a good safe distance from that ill-natured fellow. And Jimmy felt most uneasy now at the thought of Grumpy's catching him.

"He must be very hungry, after running so far," Jimmy Rabbit said to himself anxiously. "If he's as hungry as I am he wouldn't be a pleasant person to meet." And that thought made Jimmy run all the faster, for a time. But he soon found that he had to stop more often to rest. And to his great alarm Grumpy Weasel kept drawing nearer all the time.

At last Jimmy Rabbit became so worried that he swept around by the stone wall again and stopped to whisper to old Mr. Crow.

"He's still chasing me. And I can't run forever. What shall I do?" Jimmy asked the old gentleman.

"I'll think the matter over and let you know to-morrow," Mr. Crow muttered hoarsely. To tell the truth, he was alarmed himself. And he had no idea what Jimmy Rabbit could do to save himself from Grumpy Weasel.

While they talked, Grumpy's cousin, Peter Mink, watched them slyly.

"Who do you think is going to win the race?" he jeered.

Mr. Crow did not even turn his head. He felt very uncomfortable. But he tried to look unconcerned.

"Run along!" he said to Jimmy. "To-morrow I'll tell you what to do."

"To-morrow—" Jimmy Rabbit panted—"to-morrow will be too late."

Then all at once Mr. Crow had an idea.

And he whispered something in one of Jimmy Rabbit's long ears that made the poor fellow take heart.

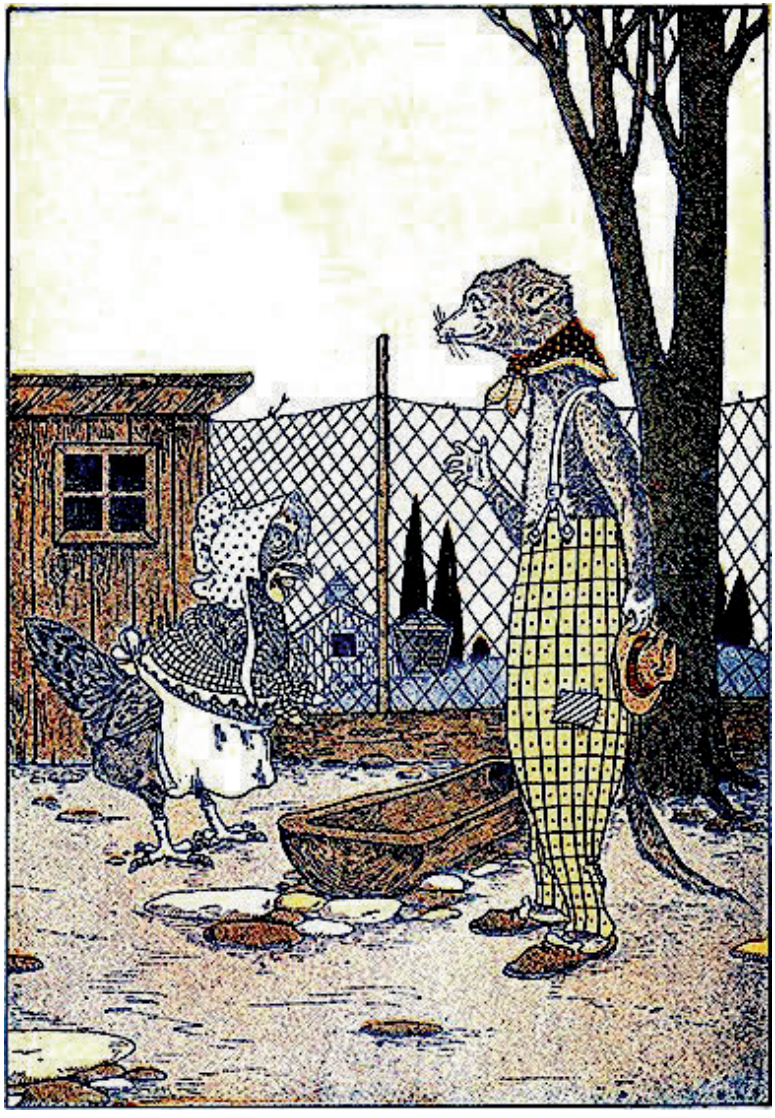
"All right!" Jimmy cried. "I'll see you again—sometime!" And away he ran, just as Grumpy Weasel came racing along the stone wall, looking as fresh as a daisy.

"You'd better stop and rest a while!" Mr. Crow croaked. "If you get too tired you'll never win."

"Rest!" Grumpy exploded. "I don't need to rest! I never felt better in my life, except that I'm pretty hungry. But I'm bound to win this race." As he spoke of feeling hungry he cast a longing glance at Jimmy Rabbit, who was just dodging out of sight behind a distant tree.

"Wait here a bit, anyhow!" Mr. Crow urged him. "Since you're sure to win—as you say—there can be no hurry." And Peter Mink too begged his cousin Grumpy to stop just a minute. And he laughed, "Ha, ha!" whenever he looked at Mr. Crow.

And strange to say, Mr. Crow said, "Ha, ha!" too.



Grumpy Calls on Mrs. Hen.

XII

WINNING BY A TRICK

Grumpy Weasel wouldn't stop long with his cousin, Peter Mink, and old Mr. Crow and all the rest.

He was in a hurry to overtake Jimmy Rabbit. And after quarreling fiercely with the whole company—except his cousin—he sprang up with a wicked glitter in his black eyes and left without another word.

"That fixed him," said Mr. Crow knowingly.

"What did?" Peter Mink demanded.

"That rest!" Mr. Crow replied. "It gave Jimmy Rabbit just time enough to go where he's going." And that was all he would say.

Not until Grumpy Weasel returned some time later did any one know what Mr. Crow meant.

Grumpy Weasel was in a terrible temper when he came slowly back. Everybody could tell, without asking, that the race was ended.

"Where did you catch him?" Peter Mink asked his cousin.

Grumpy Weasel said in a few ill-chosen words that he hadn't caught Jimmy Rabbit at all, and that somebody had played a trick on him. He looked directly at Mr. Crow as he spoke.

"It wasn't Johnny Green, was it?" Mr. Crow inquired solemnly as he moved carefully to a higher limb.

Grumpy Weasel could tell, then, without a doubt, that it was Mr. Crow that had made him lose the race. Grumpy had followed hot on Jimmy Rabbit's tracks. And to his surprise

they led straight toward the farm buildings. But Grumpy kept on and never stopped until he reached the farmyard fence where he crouched and watched Jimmy disappear—of all places!—right in the woodshed, where Johnny Green was picking up an armful of wood.

Of course Grumpy Weasel wouldn't think of entering such a dangerous place. And when he heard a shout and saw Johnny Green come out with Jimmy Rabbit in his arms he knew that Jimmy Rabbit had won the race, even if he had lost his freedom.

"It was that old black rascal, Mr. Crow, that put that notion into Jimmy Rabbit's head," Grumpy said savagely to himself as he turned and made for the woods.

"They were talking together a little while ago."

And all the way back to the stone wall he kept thinking what he would do to Mr. Crow if he could ever get hold of him. So you can see that he must have looked very dangerous when he

reached his hunting ground; and you can understand why Mr. Crow took pains to change his seat.

"I may have lost the race—through a trick," Grumpy hissed as he glared at Mr. Crow. "But one thing is certain: That young Jimmy Rabbit will trouble us no more. He's Johnny Green's prisoner."

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Crow. "He'll escape some fine day."

"Nonsense! He won't!" Grumpy Weasel disputed. And he never begged Mr. Crow's pardon. And neither did Peter Mink apologize to the old gentleman, as Mr. Crow had said he would. So in one way Mr. Crow was wrong. But in another way he was right. For it wasn't a week before Jimmy Rabbit appeared in the woods again, as spry as ever.

XIII

SILLY MRS. HEN

Strange to say, Grumpy Weasel was trying to be pleasant. Of course he didn't really know how, for he always practiced being surly and rude. It must be confessed, too, that he had succeeded in making himself heartily disliked by everybody that knew him.

There were a few, however, who had yet to learn of Grumpy Weasel's bad traits. Among these was a foolish, fat hen who lived in Farmer Green's henhouse. And now Grumpy Weasel was doing his best to make a good impression on her.

It is no wonder, perhaps, that this lady was unaware of her caller's real nature. For Grumpy was careful, as a rule, to visit the farmyard only after dark. And being a person of quiet habits Mrs. Hen was always abed and asleep at that time.

Grumpy found it a bit difficult to chat with Mrs. Hen because old dog Spot was sprawled on the farmhouse steps; and naturally Grumpy felt like keeping one eye on him. But the other he turned, as well as he could, on Mrs. Hen, who was in the hen yard looking for worms. Just outside the wire fence Grumpy Weasel crouched and told Mrs. Hen how well she was looking.

His pretty speeches pleased Mrs. Hen so much that she actually let a fat angleworm get away from her because she hadn't her mind on what she was doing. She noticed meanwhile that one of her neighbors was making frantic motions, as if she had something important to say. So Mrs. Hen sauntered across the hen yard to find out what it was.

"Don't you know whom you're talking to?" the neighbor demanded in a loud whisper. "That's Grumpy Weasel—the worst rascal in all these parts."

Somehow that sent a pleasant flutter of excitement through Mrs. Hen. At the same time she couldn't quite believe the news, because her caller had said such very pleasant things.

"Don't worry!" she told her neighbor. "I'm old enough to look out for myself."

"I should say so!" her neighbor cried. "You're three years old if you're a day!"

"I'm not!" Mrs. Hen retorted. "I'm only two and a half." Her feathers were all ruffled up and she went straight back and told Grumpy Weasel what her neighbor had said about him.

"You don't believe that, I hope," Grumpy ventured.

Mrs. Hen clucked and tried to look wise. And at last she confided to Grumpy that her

neighbor was a jealous creature and sure to speak ill of a stranger who came to call on anybody but herself.

Well, Grumpy Weasel told Mrs. Hen that he knew, when he first set eyes on her, that she was a sensible little body.

"You've a snug home here," he went on. "I can tell you that I'd like such a place to crawl into on a chilly, wet night." And though it was a warm, fine summer's day he shivered and shook, so Mrs. Hen could see.

And silly Mrs. Hen couldn't help feeling sorry for him.

XIV

GRUMPY VANISHES

Grumpy Weasel was quick to see that fat Mrs. Hen swallowed every word he said as greedily as if it had been an angleworm. "Yes! You have a fine house here," he said. "But of course you're crowded," he added gloomily, to show Mrs. Hen that he knew she had no place for him.

"Oh! Not at all!" Mrs. Hen assured him.

"And the door's always shut tight at night," he added, "on account of that prowling Tommy Fox."

"Yes! We have to be careful," said Mrs. Hen.

"And there's Peter Mink, too," Grumpy went on. "Don't leave an opening big enough for him! He can get through a small hole, too—any that's big enough for his head."

At that Mrs. Hen looked startled, as if she had just remembered something that made her feel uneasy.

"He couldn't get through a rat hole, could he?" she inquired nervously.

"Why—there isn't one here, is there?" Grumpy asked.

"There is an old one," she admitted. "It hasn't been used in my time."

"If I could see it I'd know at once whether Pete could crawl through it," Grumpy Weasel said, talking to himself—or so it seemed to Mrs. Hen.

"I'll show it to you gladly!" she cried. "Do come right in and look at our rat hole, Mr. Weasel!"

As she spoke, Mrs. Hen started for the henhouse. And after her crept Grumpy Weasel, hoping that nobody else would see him. So far as he could tell, the hens were all out of doors, scratching in the dirt. But suddenly Mrs. Hen's jealous neighbor began to set up a great squawking, calling upon Mrs. Hen to be careful, for she was in great danger.

Fat Mrs. Hen turned about with a vexed look upon her handsome but somewhat stupid face.

"Walk right in!" she said to Grumpy. "I must stop and settle with her. She has gone too far." And leaving Grumpy to find the rat hole without her help, Mrs. Hen fluttered across the hen yard with her head thrust forward, to give her meddlesome neighbor a number of hard pecks and so teach her to mind her own affairs.

With a low chuckle Grumpy Weasel slipped inside the henhouse, where he found himself quite alone. It took him but a few moments to

discover in one corner of the building the old rat hole of which Mrs. Hen had spoken.

And then he went to the door and looked out, for Mrs. Hen and her neighbor were making a terrific racket. He saw the end of the squabble. And soon Mrs. Hen came running back, with her feathers sadly rumpled, and her comb awry.

"I settled with her," she gasped. "And now tell me about the rat hole. Could Peter Mink get through it?" "No, he couldn't!" Grumpy Weasel said. Then he dodged strangely back into the henhouse. And though Mrs. Hen hopped in after him she couldn't find him anywhere. She couldn't understand it.

XV

THE GREAT MYSTERY

The story soon spread all around the farmyard, how fat Mrs. Hen had been seen talking with no less a rascal than Grumpy Weasel.

Everybody told her that it was a dangerous thing to do and that it was a wonder she had escaped, until Mrs. Hen began to feel that she was quite the most important person in the neighborhood. Even old dog Spot asked her some questions one day—some of which she could answer, and some of which she could not.

For one thing, she couldn't (or wouldn't) tell what way Grumpy left the farmyard. "He just jumped back and was gone before I knew it," she said.

"That's what they all say," said Spot. "He's so quick you never can see him go."

Now, Mrs. Hen ought to have explained that Grumpy Weasel disappeared from inside the henhouse. But she was not a person of much sense. By that time she began to think that perhaps Grumpy Weasel was as bad as the neighbors had said. And she was afraid that her relations might find fault with her if they learned that she had invited Grumpy to enter their house. Silly Mrs. Hen decided that she wouldn't tell what she had done. But she never tired of talking about what she called "the great mystery"—meaning "Where did Grumpy Weasel go?"

It was simple enough. To escape meeting old dog Spot, Grumpy Weasel had crawled into the old rat hole. It suited

him quite well to do that, for more than one reason. Not only did he avoid trouble, but he found the other end of the rat hole. Silly Mrs. Hen had done exactly as he had hoped. She had shown him a way to get into the henhouse at night in spite of locks and bolts and doors. And Grumpy Weasel went off to the woods well pleased with himself.

"Perhaps, after all, it pays to be pleasant," he said—just as if that was a reason! But he stopped short all at once. "There's that stupid Mrs. Hen," he cried aloud. "She was pleasant; but it won't pay her, in the end!" So he decided on the spot that he would keep on being surly. It would be much easier for him, anyhow.

That very night Grumpy Weasel stole back to the henhouse. And he was just about to creep up to the old rat hole, pausing first to take a searching look all around, when he saw a motionless figure sitting on a low-hanging limb of a tree near-by. It was Solomon Owl. And Grumpy could see that he was staring at

the rat hole as if he were waiting for somebody.

Grumpy Weasel knew at once that that rat hole was no safe place for him. Very gingerly he drew back into a deep shadow. And as he pondered silently he saw a huge rat step out of the hole. Solomon Owl swooped down and grabbed the fellow before he knew what was happening.

Well, Grumpy Weasel saw that all his trouble had gone for nothing. Silly Mrs. Hen hadn't known what she was talking about. If Solomon Owl was in the habit of watching that hole Grumpy certainly didn't mean to go near it.

Of course he was angry. But Mrs. Hen never learned what he said about her. No matter what remarks her neighbors made, she always insisted afterward that Grumpy Weasel was one of the most pleasant and polite gentlemen she had ever met.

XVI

GUARDING THE CORNCRIB

Grumpy Weasel never seemed to have anything but bad luck whenever he went near the farmyard. Perhaps that was the reason why he kept going back there, for he was nothing if not determined. Anyhow, he had found the hunting poor along his stone wall in the woods. And there was so much "game," as he called it, about the farm buildings that he thought it was silly to leave it for such scamps as Peter Mink and Tommy Fox and Fatty Coon.

So he took to loitering near Farmer Green's corncrib. And he was not at all pleased to find Fatty Coon there one evening. He wouldn't

have spoken to Fatty at all had not that plump young chap hurled a cutting remark directly at him: "There are no chickens in this building. This is a corncrib."

"Don't you suppose I know that?" Grumpy retorted. "I've come here to guard the corn from mice and squirrels."

"There's no need of your doing that," Fatty Coon told him. "Have you never noticed those tin pans, upside down, on top of the posts on which the corncrib rests? How could a mouse or a squirrel ever climb past one of those?"

"There are ways," Grumpy Weasel said wisely.

"I doubt it," Fatty replied. "I don't believe the trick can be done."

Then, not to oblige Fatty, but to show him he was mistaken, Grumpy climbed a tree near-by, dropped from one of its

branches to the roof of the corncrib, and quickly found a crack in the side of the

building through which he slipped with no trouble at all.

Suddenly there was a great scurrying and scrambling inside. And soon Fatty Coon saw Frisky Squirrel and several of his friends—not to mention three frightened mice—come tumbling out and tear off in every direction.

Presently Grumpy Weasel stuck his head through a crack between two boards.

"Did you catch the robbers?" he called to Fatty Coon.

"They were too spry for me," Fatty told him. He wouldn't have stopped one anyhow, for Grumpy Weasel.

"Which way did they go, old Slow Poke?" Grumpy cried as he jumped down in great haste.

"Everywhere!" Fatty told him.

"Can't you be a little more exact? You don't think—do you?—that I can run more than one way at a time?"

"Why don't you run round and round in a circle?" Fatty suggested. "In that way you might catch at least half those youngsters—and perhaps all of them."

"That's the first real idea you ever had in your life!" Grumpy exclaimed—which was as near to thanking a person as he was ever known to come.

XVII

GRUMPY'S MISTAKE

As soon as Grumpy Weasel left to chase the squirrels and mice that he had frightened away from the corncrib Fatty Coon hurried into the building through a hole in the floor which nobody knew but himself.

Though he was a great eater Fatty was also a fast one. And now he bolted a huge meal of corn in only a few minutes. Then, smiling broadly, he left the corncrib by his private doorway and squatted down to await Grumpy's return.

In a little while Grumpy appeared.

"I hoped I'd see you again," Fatty

Coon told him. "Did you have any luck?"

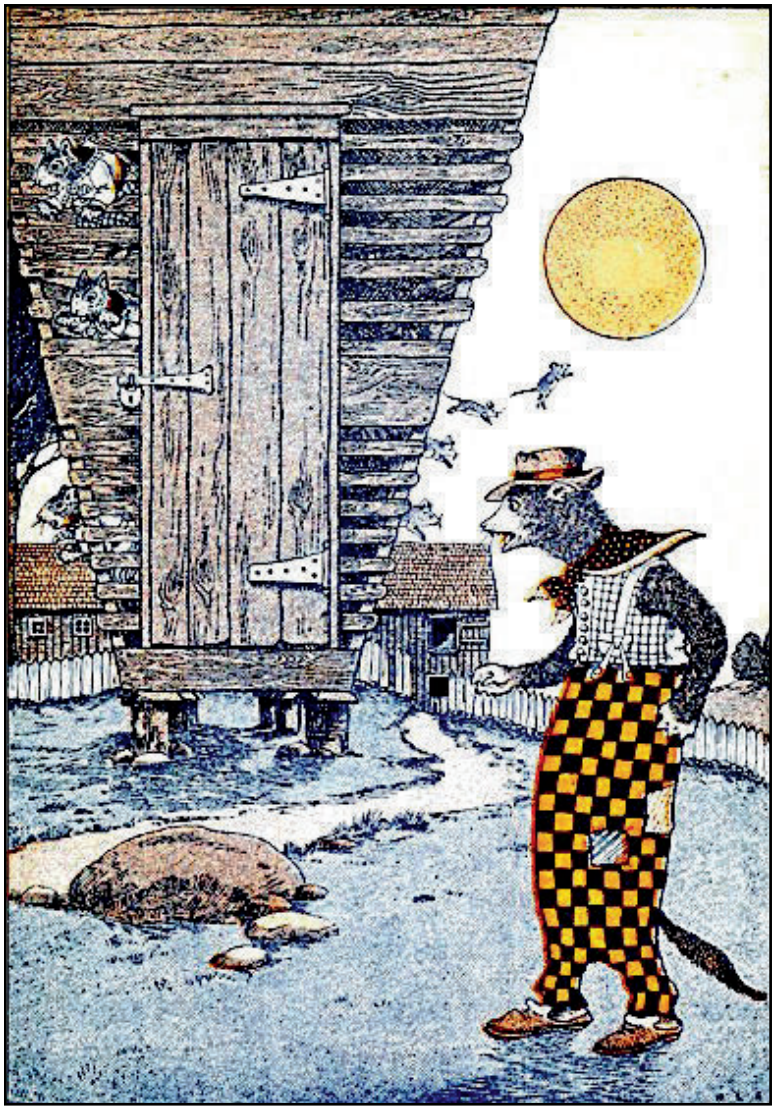
"No!" Grumpy Weasel snapped. "I was mistaken about your idea. It was a very poor one. For I've been running in a circle (as you suggested) till I'm dizzy; and I haven't seen the least sign of a mouse nor a squirrel."

Fatty Coon told him to cheer up.

"I've another idea for you," he said.

"Keep it! Keep it!" Grumpy Weasel hissed. "Your last idea only made me tired; and I haven't a capture to my credit to-night."

"That's because you ran too fast," Fatty explained glibly. "Now, if you'll be careful to run slowly, and do just as I tell you, I can promise that there'll be a capture, without fail."



Grumpy Weasel Visits the Corncrib.

Grumpy had had such bad luck in his hunting about the farmyard that he decided to listen, anyhow. He told himself

that he wouldn't take Fatty's advice unless it was much better than he expected.

"Well—go on!" he grunted.

"Do you see that little house near the woodshed?" Fatty Coon asked him. "It has a low doorway that's always open, and no windows at all."

"Yes!" said Grumpy Weasel harshly. "Of course I see it. I'm not blind."

"Do you know who lives there?"

"I always supposed that it belonged to Johnny Green," said Grumpy. "His father is big and lives in the big house, and Johnny is little and lives in the little house."

Fatty Coon laughed merrily.

"You don't know as much as I thought you did!" he cried. It may be that Fatty had set out to make Grumpy angry. Anyhow, Grumpy's eyes burned in the darkness like two coals of fire.

"I'm right about that little house," he wrangled.

"Nonsense!" Fatty Coon exclaimed. And that made Grumpy angrier than ever.

"You learned that word of old Mr. Crow!" he grumbled. "It's his favorite expression; and I can't endure it."

"You don't need to stay here and listen to it," Fatty Coon said. "If you dared to you could run over to Johnny Green's house (as you call it); and if you found that you were right about it I promise you I'd never say 'Nonsense' again."

If Grumpy Weasel hadn't been so angry perhaps he wouldn't have been so eager to prove himself right. While Fatty watched him

he bounded across the farmyard and stopped at the doorway of the tiny house. And then he bounded back again, a great deal faster, with old dog Spot yelping behind him.

Fatty Coon did not wait for anything more. He made for the woods at top speed, grinning as he went.

The next day he pretended to be surprised to meet Grumpy.

"You must have forgotten my advice," he said. "I promised you that there would be a capture if you ran slowly. But it's plain that you ran too fast, or you wouldn't be here."

"Nonsense!" Grumpy Weasel shouted, flying into a passion at once. And he often wondered, afterward, what Fatty Coon found to laugh at.

Gunston & The Book Bunnies
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XVIII

POP! GOES THE WEASEL

There were many things that did not please Grumpy Weasel—things that almost any one else would have liked. For instance, there was music. The Pleasant Valley Singing Society, to which most of the bird people belonged, did not number Grumpy Weasel among its admirers. He never cared to hear a bird sing—not even Jolly Robin's cousin the Hermit, who was one of the most beautiful singers in the woods. And as for Buddy Brown Thrasher, whom most people thought a brilliant performer, Grumpy Weasel always groaned whenever he heard him singing in the topmost branches of a tree.

A bird-song—according to Grumpy Weasel—was of use in only one way: it told you where the bird was. And that was a help, of course, if you were trying to catch him.

Nor did the musical Frog family's nightly concerts have much charm for Grumpy, though he did admit that some of their songs were not so bad as others.

"I can stand it now and then," he said, "to hear a good, glum croaking, provided there are plenty of discords."

Naturally, knowing how he felt, Grumpy Weasel's neighbors never invited him to listen to their concerts. On the contrary they usually asked him please to go away, if he happened to come along. Certainly nobody could sing his best, with such a listener.

As a rule Grumpy Weasel was glad to go on about his business, though to be sure he hated to oblige anybody. But one day he stopped and scolded at the top of his voice when he came

upon the Woodchuck brothers whistling in the pasture.

Their whistles quavered a bit when they noticed who was present. And they moved a little nearer their front door, in order to dodge out of sight if need be. Although Grumpy Weasel might follow them, there was a back door they could rush out of. And since they knew their way about their underground halls better than he did they did not worry greatly.

"We're sorry—" said the biggest brother, who was called Billy Woodchuck—"we're sorry you don't like our music. And we'd like to know what's the matter with it; for we always strive to please."

Grumpy snarled, "though your whistling is bad enough, it's so cheerful. What I find fault with especially is the tune. It's insulting to me. And you can't deny it."

Well, the Woodchuck brothers looked at one another in a puzzled fashion.

"Never again let me hear you whistling, 'Pop! Goes the Weasel,'" Grumpy warned them. That was the name of the Woodchuck brothers' favorite air, and the one they could whistle best. And any one could see that they were quite upset.

"Why don't you like that tune?" Billy Woodchuck asked Grumpy Weasel politely.

"It's that word 'pop,'" Grumpy said. "It reminds me of a pop-gun. And a pop-gun reminds me of a real gun. And that's something I don't want to think about."

Well, the Woodchuck brothers looked at one another again. But this time they smiled.

"You've misunderstood," Billy Woodchuck told Grumpy Weasel. "This is a different kind of *pop*. It means that when you enter a hole you *pop* into it in a jiffy, without taking all day to do it."

For a wonder Grumpy Weasel was almost pleased.

"That's true!" he cried. "I couldn't be slow if I wanted to be!" And he actually asked the Woodchuck brothers to whistle "Pop! Goes the Weasel" once more.

But Grumpy Weasel never thought of thanking them.

XIX

HIDING FROM HENRY HAWK

In the spring Grumpy Weasel was always glad to see the birds coming back from the South. But it must not be supposed that it was because he liked to hear them sing (for he didn't!).

Nor should any one make the mistake of thinking that Grumpy Weasel loved the birds. The only reason why he welcomed them was because he liked to hunt them, and rob their nests.

But there were two birds that Grumpy didn't care to have in Pleasant Valley. He often wished that Solomon Owl and Henry Hawk

would leave the neighborhood and never return. That was because they liked to hunt him.

Especially did Grumpy Weasel dislike Henry Hawk, who had an unpleasant habit of sitting motionless on a limb in the top of some great tree. From that high perch he swept the whole valley with his keen, cruel eyes, because (as he said) he "liked to see what was going on."

If Henry Hawk saw anything anywhere that interested him he lost no time in reaching that place. It might be a bird, or a meadow mouse, or maybe a plump chicken. And he was always hoping to catch a glimpse of Grumpy Weasel.

One day early in the fall Mr. Hawk saw what he had been looking for so long. Near the old cider mill, up the road from Farmer Green's house, he spied a long, slender, brownish shape moving swiftly among a pile of barrels outside the building. He knew at once that it was Grumpy Weasel; and though he was a long way off Mr. Hawk could see that Grumpy was very busy looking for something—so busy,

Mr. Hawk hoped, that Grumpy wouldn't notice anything else.

Henry Hawk had wonderful eyesight. As he came hurtling down out of the sky he could see that Grumpy was playing hide-and-seek with a mouse.

"It's a shame to break up the game," Mr. Hawk chuckled to himself.

And just then something made Grumpy Weasel look up. It must have been Henry Hawk's shadow flickering over a barrel. There was no other sign that could have warned Grumpy.

He put the meadow mouse out of his mind without a bit of trouble and made a sidewise spring for the first hole on which his eyes lighted.

Grumpy was through it in a twinkling. Henry Hawk made a frantic grab with his talons at the black tip of Grumpy's tail, just as it whisked out of sight. But he was too late.

It did not soothe Henry Hawk's feelings to find that the meadow mouse had vanished at the same time. Henry would have liked to play hide-and-seek with him himself.

Mr. Hawk knew well enough where Grumpy was hiding. That slim fellow had sought safety in an empty jug, which was lying on its side near the pile of barrels. It made a fine fort for Grumpy Weasel. The enemy couldn't break through it. And there was only one loophole, which was far too small to do Henry Hawk the least good.

Henry saw at once that he might as well go away. So he went off grumbling.

"This," he said, "is what comes of disorderly habits. Farmer Green ought not to have left that jug lying there. If he hadn't, I might have been able to do him a good turn."

XX

A FREE RIDE

Inside the jug, where he had hidden to escape Henry Hawk, Grumpy Weasel yawned widely and licked his chops. He was having a dull time, waiting until he was sure that Henry Hawk had given up the chase and gone away.

In a little while Grumpy believed he could venture out in safety. But suddenly, to his great disgust, a wagon came clattering in from the road and pulled up right beside the pile of empty barrels near him.

It was Farmer Brown, driving his old horse Ebenezer. And of course Grumpy Weasel

didn't care to show himself just then, especially with old dog Spot nosing around. He had already heard Spot give several sharp yelps.

"That old dog knows I'm here somewhere but he can't tell exactly where," Grumpy said to himself. "He can yelp his head off, for all I care."

And then Spot began to whine, and run in and out among the barrels, until he all but tripped Farmer Green, who was loading the barrels into the wagon.

"Let him whine!" said Grumpy Weasel softly. "His yelping and whining don't scare me. He can't get inside this jug of mine. And I certainly shan't leave it so long as he stays here."

Meanwhile he could hear Farmer Green talking to old Spot, telling him not to be silly.

"From the way you're acting anybody might think there was a bear around here," he told Spot.

Old dog Spot explained to Farmer Green in no uncertain fashion that it was no bear—but a weasel—that he was looking for. His nose told him that. And there was no mistake about it. But somehow Farmer Green couldn't understand a word he said. So after putting the last barrel on the load Farmer Green climbed up himself and started to drive off.

But old dog Spot wouldn't budge an inch. He hovered about the jug where Grumpy Weasel was hiding and made such a fuss that Farmer Green looked back at him.

"Well! well!" he exclaimed. And he stopped the horse Ebenezer and jumped down and walked back again.

"I declare I'd have forgotten to take this jug if you hadn't reminded me of it," he told Spot. And thereupon he picked up the jug and set it in the back of the wagon.

This time Spot followed. This time he was in the wagon before Farmer Green was. And all the way down the road, until they reached the farmyard, he acted (or so Farmer Green told him!) like a simpleton.

The whole affair made Grumpy Weasel terribly angry. He thought it was an outrage for Farmer Green to kidnap him like that. And he was so enraged that he would have taken a bite out of anything handy. But there wasn't a thing in the jug except himself.

At last the strange party drew up in front of the barn and stopped. Farmer Green led Ebenezer into his stall. And then he took the jug, with Grumpy Weasel still inside in, and in spite of Spot's protests set it high up on a shelf in the barn.

It was easy for Grumpy, after that, to crawl out of the jug. He scurried along the shelf, climbed up the wall, and glided through a crack in the ceiling, to hide himself in the haymow above.

"Old Spot didn't get me this time!" he said gleefully. "Not by a jugful, he didn't!"

XXI

A NEW SUIT

Throughout Pleasant Valley the very name of Grumpy Weasel was a bugaboo. Those of his size, and many a good deal bigger than he, learned early to avoid him.

One of the first things Sandy Chipmunk's mother did was to teach him to beware of Grumpy. And twice during his first summer Sandy caught a glimpse of Grumpy as he flashed past like a brown streak, with a gleam of white showing underneath.

It was lucky for Sandy that on both occasions Grumpy was intent on chasing somebody or other. And each time that

Sandy told his mother what he had seen, Mrs. Chipmunk said that she hoped it would never happen again.

"I'm glad that you know what he looks like, anyhow," she added.

"Oh, I'll know him if I see him!" Sandy cried.

"Don't stop for a second look!" his mother warned him.

"I won't!" he promised. "I won't even stop to say, 'How do you do!'"

"I should hope not!" Mrs. Chipmunk said severely.

So Sandy Chipmunk went through his first summer on the watch for a long, slender, brownish shape. But he never saw Grumpy Weasel again. And winter found the Chipmunk family all unharmed, and very

comfortable in their cozy house below frost line.

On mild days Sandy liked to visit the world above and find a rock bare of snow, where he could enjoy the sunshine.

It was on one of those outings that he caught sight of a stranger headed for the stone wall near-by. At first Sandy missed seeing him, against the snow. But when he reached the wind-swept wall Sandy couldn't help noticing him. He was a slim gentleman and—except for his black-tipped tail—was dressed all in white.

After spending the winter underground Sandy Chipmunk was glad to talk with the first person he saw. So he called to the stranger that it was a fine day, wasn't it?

The other wheeled about so quickly that Sandy couldn't help laughing.

"Don't be nervous!" Sandy cried. "I won't hurt you!"

But the stranger didn't answer. Once he opened his mouth. And Sandy Chipmunk had a queer feeling then that he had met the fellow before. That mouth had plenty of white, needle-like teeth. It had a cruel look, too.

Then the stranger jumped straight toward Sandy Chipmunk. And in that instant Sandy knew who he was. No one could leap like that except Grumpy Weasel!

Sandy turned and ran madly for shelter. Luckily he had the advantage of Grumpy in one way. He had a bare ledge to run on, while Grumpy Weasel had to flounder for some distance through a snow-choked hollow.

So Sandy escaped. And it was lucky that Grumpy didn't find the door to the Chipmunk family's burrow. If he had he would have gone right in himself.

Mrs. Chipmunk blamed herself for Sandy's adventure. She had never remembered to tell her son that every fall Grumpy Weasel

changed his summer dress for the one in which Sandy had just seen him.

XXII

GRUMPY'S THREAT

Meeting Grumpy Weasel in the woods one day, Tommy Fox stopped to have a chat with him. He always liked to chat with Grumpy, it was so easy to get him angry, and such fun to see him fly into a passion.

"You're looking very elegant in your winter suit," Tommy Fox remarked. "White is becoming to you—there's no doubt of that. And that black tip on the end of your tail is just what's needed to complete your costume. It matches your eyes nicely.... You must have a good tailor."

Sandy Chipmunk Runs From Grumpy Weasel.

People were apt to be wary of Tommy Fox when fine words dripped from his mouth like that. It usually meant that he was bent on some mischief. And now Grumpy Weasel looked at him suspiciously.

"If you admire my clothes so much why don't you get some like them?" he demanded.

Tommy Fox shook his head mournfully.

"I'd like to," he said, "but I'm too humble a person to dress like a king, in ermine. My family have always worn red. The neighbors wouldn't know me in anything else. Or if they did they'd say I was putting on airs."

"If you want to know what I think, I'll tell you that red's entirely too good for you," Grumpy Weasel sneered.

Tommy Fox smiled somewhat sourly. Grumpy Weasel's remark did not please him. But he managed to say nothing disagreeable.

"I suppose," he went on, "you've met the newcomer in our valley who dresses as you do, in white and black?"

"What's that you say?" Grumpy Weasel barked. "Who's gone and copied my cold-weather clothes? If I meet him I'll make it hot for him."

"Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned the matter," Tommy Fox said softly. "I don't like to displease you. And I don't want to get a stranger into trouble either, just as he has come to spend the winter amongst us.

"And besides," Tommy added, "it would be a shame for you to quarrel with the stranger because he happens to choose your favorite colors. That only goes to show that your tastes are alike."

"That's exactly what I object to!"

Grumpy Weasel complained, getting much excited. "If his tastes are the same as mine he'll want to come and hunt along my stone

wall. And there'll be trouble if he does that! The fur will fly!"

Tommy Fox turned his head away, for he simply had to enjoy a grin and he didn't want Grumpy Weasel to see it.

"I'm sorry I spoke about the stranger," he said glibly, as soon as he could keep his face straight. "But I thought the news would please you."

"It would certainly please me to meet him," Grumpy Weasel declared fiercely. "And it would please me much more than it would him, I can tell you."

"It wouldn't be treating a newcomer well to let him wander through the woods when you feel as you do about him. I ought to warn him to leave Pleasant Valley before it's too late," Tommy said.

"It would be treating him better to give him a good lesson before he goes," Grumpy Weasel said. "You needn't say a word to him about my

wanting to meet him. Let the fur fly first! And then he'll flee.

"That's my way of getting rid of strangers!"

XXIII

A BOLD STRANGER

Tommy Fox had carefully kept from Grumpy Weasel the name of the stranger who was dressed like Grumpy, in white and black. It happened that he wore feathers—this newcomer. And that was one reason why Tommy Fox had had to grin when Grumpy threatened to "make the fur fly" when he met the unknown.

Another reason why Tommy had laughed at Grumpy's blustering was that the stranger was quite able to take care of himself in a fight. He belonged to the Snowy Owl family, being bigger, even, than Solomon Owl. And what with his

hooked beak and his strong talons he was a dangerous fellow to meet. Although Grumpy Weasel could easily handle a rabbit or a wild duck a dozen times his own size, because they were unarmed, he would have had no chance at all with Mr. Snowy Owl.

All this made Tommy Fox chuckle and grin, as he left Grumpy and loped off towards Cedar Swamp, where Mr. Snowy Owl was spending the winter. Unlike Solomon Owl, and his cousin Simon Screecher, Mr. Snowy Owl did not turn night into day. So Tommy Fox found him wide awake and ready for a fight or a frolic, whichever might come his way.

He was a handsome bird—this newcomer—in his showy white suit, spotted with black. And he gave Tommy Fox a bold, hard look, acting for all the world as if he had spent his whole life in Pleasant Valley, instead of merely two short weeks.

Now, Mr. Snowy Owl knew a good deal about such rascals as Tommy Fox. So he said at once, "What's on your mind, young man?

You've come here on mischief and you needn't deny it."

Well, Tommy Fox saw that he couldn't deceive Mr. Owl very much. So he grinned at him and told him about the talk he had just had with Grumpy Weasel.

"He's so eager to meet you it would be too bad to disappoint him," Tommy observed. "He wants the fur to fly, you know."

Although he had no ears (at least, so far as could be seen) Mr. Snowy Owl had listened closely to Tommy Fox's story. And he must have heard plainly enough, for he said quickly that he would call on Grumpy Weasel that very day. "I'll start

right now," he said, "and I'll reach Grumpy Weasel's hunting ground before you're out of the swamp."

"I wish you'd wait a bit, till I can get there myself," Tommy Fox told him.

Mr. Snowy Owl agreed to that. And after lingering until he thought Tommy must have had time to run and find Grumpy Weasel he rose above the tops of the cedars and sailed off to join them himself.

"I'm glad I came here to spend the winter," he muttered. "Everybody's been very pleasant so far. And after people hear how I've settled with this Weasel person the folks in Pleasant Valley will be pretty polite to me, or I'll know the reason why."

XXIV

FUR AND FEATHERS

To find Grumpy Weasel, Tommy Fox went straight back to the place where he had left him. It was easy, then, to follow his queer tracks. Grumpy's legs were so short that they did not lift his lean body clear of the deep snow, except when he jumped very high; so his trail looked somewhat like that of a snake with legs.

As soon as Tommy overtook him he asked Grumpy if he had seen the stranger yet, who was dressed all in white and black, like him.

"No, I haven't. But I'm on the lookout for him all the time," said Grumpy.

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"Where are you looking?" Tommy inquired.

"Oh! Everywhere!" Grumpy replied. "Behind the trees and in the bushes and back of the stone wall!"

"Have you seen any new tracks?" Tommy persisted.

"Not one!" Grumpy admitted. And then he thought he caught the flicker of a smile on Tommy Fox's narrow face. "If there is no such person—if you've been deceiving me——" he began angrily.

"I promise you that there *is* such a stranger in the neighborhood!" Tommy cried. "And if you don't meet him to-day I'll be as disappointed as you."

"It seems to me," Grumpy Weasel snapped, "you're altogether too anxious over this business. Everybody knows you're tricky. And I begin to think you're trying to get me into trouble."

It was wonderful, the way Tommy Fox could keep his temper. No matter what people said to him he could still smile if it would help him to have his way. And now he kept up a never-ending chatter, without saying anything in particular.

The snow was deep enough to have covered such hiding places as Grumpy Weasel liked. The stone wall, indeed, offered about the only crannies; and that was some distance away. Tommy Fox had noticed that. And that was why he was trying to keep Grumpy Weasel where he was. For Tommy expected Mr. Snowy Owl at any moment.

"You are talking foolishness," Grumpy told Tommy Fox at last. "I don't care to waste my time listening to you." And he turned away.

"One moment, please!" Tommy begged, for the sly rascal had just caught a glimpse of Mr. Snowy Owl hovering above the trees.

"What do you want now?" Grumpy Weasel scolded, as he paused close by the old hemlock

where Solomon Owl sometimes sat and abused him.

"I want to see the fur fly," Tommy Fox answered wickedly.

For a moment Grumpy Weasel couldn't think what he meant. But suddenly he saw a large whitish shape dropping upon him out of the sky. He knew then, in a flash, that Tommy Fox had deceived him.

A moment more and it was all over. At least, it seemed so to Tommy Fox. Whatever had happened had taken place so quickly that he couldn't see it clearly. But there was Mr. Snowy Owl, sitting on a limb of the hemlock, where he had perched after staying half a second's time on the ground.

And Grumpy Weasel was no longer to be seen, anywhere.

"Did—did you swallow him?" Tommy Fox stammered.

Mr. Snowy Owl looked puzzled.

"I don't know," he replied. "Perhaps I did! If I didn't I don't know where he is."

Tommy Fox couldn't help looking disappointed. "I'm sorry about one thing," he said. "It was all done so quickly I didn't see the fur fly!"

Then there was a faint sound above them. And looking up, Tommy and Mr. Owl saw Grumpy Weasel's head sticking out of a small hole high up in the tree-trunk.

As they watched him Grumpy Weasel seemed to be saying something to them. They couldn't hear what it was. But no doubt it was nothing pleasant.

XXV

PETER MINK'S PROMISE

It happened, on a bleak winter's day, that Grumpy Weasel was strolling along the bank of Broad Brook when all at once he heard a squall. Instantly he whirled around. There was something about the cry that sounded familiar. And while he searched the stream up and down with his sharp eyes he grew angrier every moment.

"Unless I'm mistaken that's my good-for-nothing cousin, Peter Mink," Grumpy muttered. "I'll teach him not to squall at me—the rascal!"

He did not have to look long before he caught sight of his cousin. Peter Mink was crouched under the overhanging bank, not far from the

edge of the frozen surface of the brook. And he squalled again when he saw that Grumpy had discovered him.

"Stop that!" Grumpy Weasel bellowed. He was not greatly afraid of Peter Mink, though his cousin was much bigger than he. "I'll have you know that I don't allow people to bawl at me, even if we are distantly related."

"I wasn't bawling at you," Peter Mink answered. And he was strangely polite, for him. "I was calling for help. Can't you see that my foot is caught in a trap?"

At that Grumpy jumped down upon the ice and took a good look at Peter Mink. He saw, then, that Peter spoke the truth. "This trap hurts my foot, I can tell you," Peter Mink whined.

"Maybe it will teach you not to screech at people," Grumpy told him.

"You're going to help me, aren't you?" Peter Mink asked his cousin anxiously.

"That trap belongs to Farmer Green's hired man," Grumpy informed Peter Mink. "I saw him when he set it there. Perhaps you would like to have me send word to him that you're using it."

"Oh! Don't do that!" Peter begged piteously.

"Well, then—suppose I get old dog Spot to come and see what he can do! He'd have you out of that trap in no time!"

But that suggestion didn't suit Peter Mink any better.

"For goodness' sake, can't you think of something else?" he wailed.

His voice rose higher and higher as he spoke. And Grumpy Weasel showed his sharp teeth as he warned Peter Mink

again not to squall at him, for he wouldn't stand it.

At last Peter saw that Grumpy did not intend to help him at all. So it occurred to him that

perhaps he could hire his cousin to free him from the trap. "I'd do anything for you if you could help me out of this fix," he said finally.

"Will you drive Mr. Snowy Owl away from Pleasant Valley?" Grumpy cried.

"Certainly!" said Peter Mink with great promptness, as if that were the easiest matter in the world.

That answer surprised Grumpy Weasel. He had no idea that Peter Mink could do any such thing. And he said as much, too.

"You understand," Peter explained, "it may take me some time to get rid of him. It's mid-winter now. But I can promise you that I'll have him out of the valley by April Fool's Day!"

XXVI

HOW GRUMPY HELPED

Grumpy Weasel wondered how Peter Mink was going to get Mr. Snowy Owl out of Pleasant Valley. He had never dreamed that Peter could do it. But as he thought the matter over he remembered that Peter was a good deal bigger than himself.

"If I were Peter Mink's size I would give Mr. Snowy Owl the worst punishing he ever had!" Grumpy exclaimed under his breath. "So maybe Peter can do as he claims, after all."

"Very well!" Grumpy Weasel told Peter Mink. "This is a bargain. I'll help you out of the trap.

And you'll rid Pleasant Valley of Mr. Snowy Owl by April Fool's Day."

"Agreed!" Peter Mink cried. "And now, how are you going to set me free?"

"I'm going to bite your leg off," Grumpy Weasel said cheerfully.

"Oh, no! You're not going to do that!" Peter Mink howled. "I don't want you to do that!"

"I made a bargain with you," Grumpy Weasel reminded him, "and I intend to carry out my part of it."

"Stop a moment," Peter Mink cried. For Grumpy Weasel, with his back arched like a cat's, and his white whiskers twitching, had already taken a step towards him. "If you bite off my leg I'd never be able to get rid of Mr. Snowy Owl."

That brought Grumpy Weasel up short. He thought deeply for a moment; and then he exclaimed: "I have it! You must bite off your own leg!"

But Peter Mink proved a hard one to please.

"You don't understand!" he said. "If I lose a leg I know I never could get Mr. Snowy Owl out of the valley."

At that Grumpy Weasel lost his temper completely. With a cry of rage he sprang at his cousin, Peter Mink, prisoner though he was. And Grumpy would have buried his white teeth in him except for just one thing. As he leaped forward Peter Mink leaped backward. And in that moment Peter freed himself. He had been caught only by the merest tip of a toe, anyhow. And now he crouched with his back against the bank of the brook, facing Grumpy Weasel with mouth wide open. His meekness had dropped off him like an old coat. And Grumpy Weasel knew better than to get within his reach. In fact he turned polite himself, all at once.

"There!" he said. "I got you out of the trap, as I had planned to all the time. I knew that if I could make you jump you'd pull your foot loose."

Well, Peter Mink hardly believed that. But he thought there was no use of saying so.

He was glad enough to escape Farmer Green's hired man's trap without having a dispute over the way it happened.

"I hope you'll keep your promise," Grumpy told Peter Mink. "If Mr. Snowy Owl doesn't leave these parts by April Fool's Day I won't like it very well. You know you agreed to get him away from here by that time."

"Oh! He'll be gone by then," said Peter Mink lightly. "He always leaves

at the end of the winter, because he spends his summers in the Far North."

When he heard that, Grumpy Weasel was angry as anything.

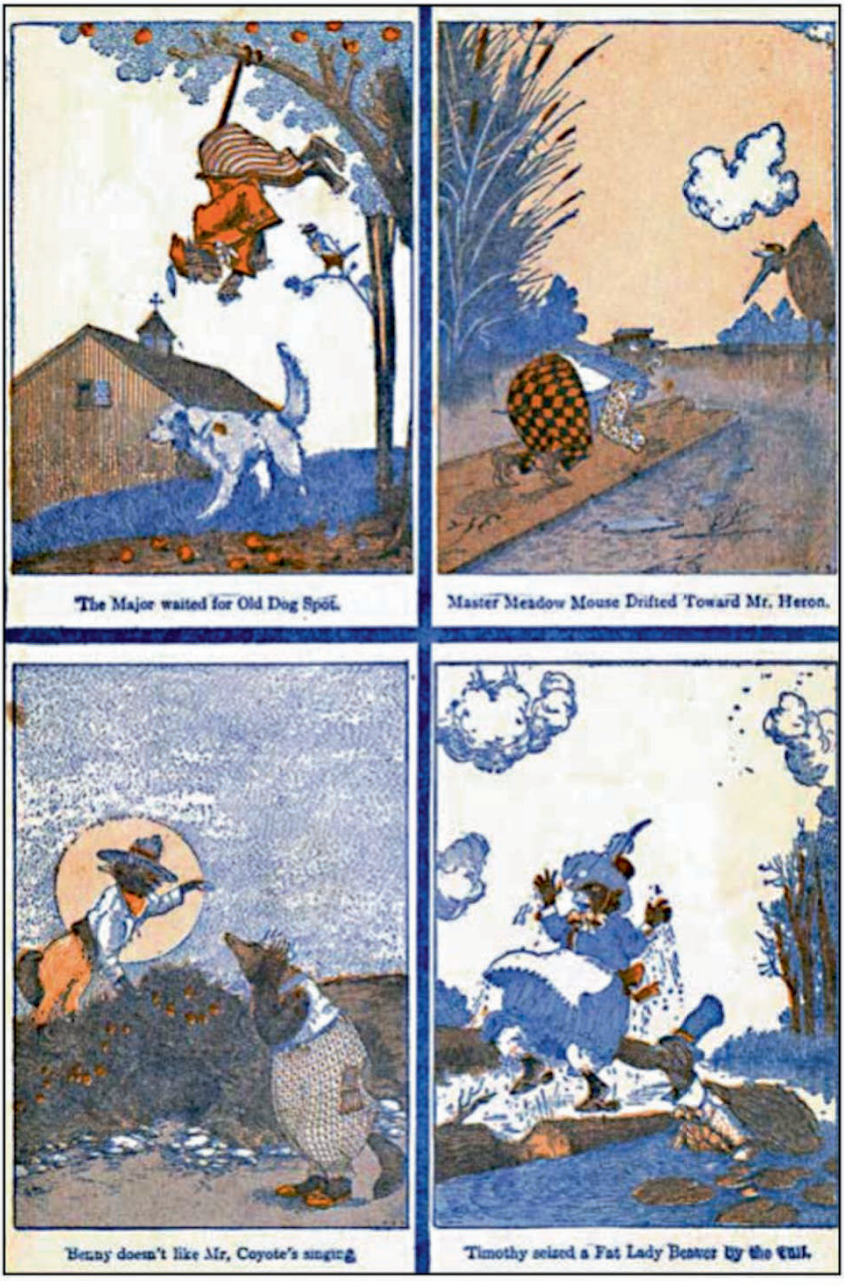
"Then Mr. Owl is likely to be back here next fall," he said quickly.

"I dare say," Peter Mink admitted carelessly.

Grumpy Weasel backed cautiously away before he said another word. But when he had whisked into a great willow that leaned over Broad Brook he told his cousin what he thought about him.

As for Peter Mink—he was nursing his injured paw (in his mouth!) and he said never a word.

THE END



The Major waited for Old Dog Spot.

Master Meadow Mouse Drifted Toward Mr. Heron.

Benny doesn't like Mr. Coyote's singing.

Timothy seized a Fat Lady Beaver by the tail.

"What About Ducks?" Mr. Crow Called

Cuffy Gave It One Good, Hard Cuff

"What's the Matter?" Billy Asked

"Will It Hurt?" Frisky Squirrel Asked

GUNSTON CLASSICS
SLEEPY-TIME TALES

- *The Tale of Cuffy Bear* (c. 1915)
- *The Tale of Frisky Squirrel* (c. 1915)
- *The Tale of Tommy Fox* (c. 1915)
- *The Tale of Fatty Coon* (c. 1915)
- *The Tale of Jimmy Rabbit* (c. 1916)
- *The Tale of Sandy Chipmunk* (c. 1916)

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- *The Tale of Grandfather Mole* (c. 1920)

- *The Tale of Grumpy Weasel* (c. 1920)
- *The Tale of Master Meadow Mouse* (c. 1921)
- *The Tale of Nimble Deer* (c. 1922)

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